



Wal-Mart's Walton Family Backs Art-Hotel in Arkansas

Walton Family, 21c Museum Hotel to Build Near to Crystal Bridges Museum

By KRIS HUDSON

Wal-Mart Stores Inc.'s founding Walton family will help finance an art-themed hotel in downtown Bentonville, Ark., near the headquarters of the world's largest retailer.



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21c Museum Hotel

21c founders Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown

A Walton family investment arm and partner 21c Museum Hotel of Louisville, Ky., are scheduled to disclose Tuesday that they will construct a \$28 million, 130-room hotel near Bentonville's downtown square that will open by 2012.

The hotel is one of a handful that operator 21c is modeling after the original 90-room 21c Museum Hotel that it opened in downtown Louisville in 2006.

In an unusual twist, the hotel will be designed to complement the \$150 million Crystal

Bridges Museum of American Art that is under construction nearby. The Bentonville museum is financed mostly by Wal-Mart heiress Alice Walton.

The 21c hotel will be financed and owned by the Walton family, 21c and local nonprofit group Bentonville Revitalization Inc. "Cultural tourism and the arts," said Daniel Hintz, executive director of Downtown Bentonville Inc., "are very powerful economic engines for cities."



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21c Museum Hotel

Contemporary art adorns a guest room at 21c art hotel in Louisville

The hotel company, founded and operated by husband-and-wife Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown, specializes in adorning rooms and common areas of its hotels with contemporary art for viewing, but not for sale. Its name is intended as a nod to 21st century artists. Among the collections previously featured at its Louisville hotel were works by New York artist Mickalene Thomas.

"We feel most people are intimidated by the traditional museum atmosphere, with the guards and the red ropes," Mr. Wilson said.

"We have a totally embracing experience

where they walk into the hotel and they're in the middle of an art gallery."

Some Walton family members visited the 12c hotel in Louisville prior to contacting the company about opening a hotel in Bentonville, Mr. Wilson said. A Walton family representative confirmed the family's involvement in the 21c project but declined to comment further.

The Walton family owns 45% of Wal-Mart, a stake valued at roughly \$85 billion. In Bentonville, 21c intends to charge nightly rates of roughly \$190. Its Louisville rates average \$213. The company has disclosed plans to open art-themed hotels in Austin and Cincinnati.